



THE

AUGUR

VOL. 1 NO. 2—MARCH 1977

PRICE: \$1.00/\$8.00 PER YEAR

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE BIBLICAL NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

9301 WILSHIRE BOULEVARD

BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA 90210

All rights reserved. No reproduction in whole or in part in any manner is permitted without permission.

BNS = 2 + 100

Our Biblical Numismatic Society is just two months old, and we already have signed up our 100th charter member!

We have received excellent publicity from COIN WORLD and WORLD COIN NEWS . . . and are hopeful of getting even more press exposure in the future. Also, please consider yourself appointed to the BNS Publicity Committee—try to have the BNS written up in your coin club's bulletin, your church or synagogue newsletter, or in your local newspaper. Probably the best way to obtain new members is by word of mouth. I'm sure that you have friends that would be interested. Tell them about the Society or send us their names and addresses and we will send full membership information. Be a BNS-booster!

Mel Wacks NLG
Editor

Coin of the Month

BAR KOCHBA'S

HARVEST FESTIVAL SYMBOLS

This month's coin is the reverse of the previously described silver tetradrachm (Hebrew—sela) of Bar Kochba, minted in the third year of the Second Revolt (134/135 AD). The source for the harvest symbols employed on this coin is first prescribed in the Book of Leviticus for the Jewish Festival of the Ingathering, called Succoth: "And ye shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days" (Lev. 23:40). Rabbinic authorities named these the four species, declaring the citron (ethrog) as the fruit, the thick trees as myrtle, plus the palm (lulav) and willow. For the fruit to be acceptable for use in the harvest festival, it must be perfect and must have a portion of the original stem attached. This can be seen on the ethrog (located to the left of the bound branches) on Bar Kochba's tetradrachm.

It is often difficult to define "obverse" and "reverse" on ancient Judaeen coins. Since they generally did not use portraits, there is no simple "heads" (obverse) and "tails" (reverse). That leads us to several schools of thought—the obverse is the side with (1) minting authority, (2) date, or (3) the most important design. As with other aspects of the supposed science of numismatics different experts do not always agree, and even the same authority may change his criteria depending on the particular coin. So don't be upset if one person's "obverse" is another's "reverse"!

In the instance of this large silver coin of Bar Kochba, the Temple depiction (discussed last month) would be considered of greater importance than the harvest symbols, the minting authority (Jerusalem or Simon Bar Kochba) is on the obverse, and the date (when it appears) is on the reverse. However, on our particular Coin-of-the-Month there is no date—just the Hebrew inscription "LECHEROT YERUSHALAM" (For the Freedom of Jerusalem). So how do we know when it was struck?

The other two major types of Bar Kochba tetradrachms both carry dates on the reverse—"Year One of the Redemption of Israel" and "Year Two of the Freedom of Israel." According to Arie Kindler, in COINS OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL, "In attempting to ascertain the order in which Bar Kochba's coins were issued, early scholars sought to use the form of legend as a criteria . . . It was originally assumed that the initial legend (a) the slogan 'For the Freedom of Jerusalem,' was superseded when its aim was achieved in the first year of the war, and that subsequently Bar Kochba was able to change the era of the war to 'Year One of the Redemption of Israel' in the following year. Thus (they believed) 'Year One' was issued in the second year of the war, and the coins of legend (c) 'Year Two of the Freedom of Israel' were issued in the third year. However, both the coins and the documents from the Judaeen Desert prove just the opposite, i.e. that the undated coins are the last in the series and were thus issued in the third year of the war (134/135 C.E.)."

As late as 1903, Frederic Madden (COINS OF THE JEWS) was attributing those tetradrachms with the inscription "Year One of the Redemption of Israel" to the First Revolt, and the dateless and "Year Two" coins to the first and second years of the Bar Kochba Revolt! →

The precise science of determining die sequences is the method that Kindler, Meshorer, Mildenberg, et al have used to solve the mystery of which Bar Kochba tetradrachm came first. Every ancient die had to be hand cut, and therefore each one had its own characteristics and idiosyncracies transferred to the coins struck from it . . . the location of the objects and inscriptions, shapes of letters, etc. Whenever one die would eventually wear out, a new die would come into use. Presumably two dies (both obverse and reverse) would not wear out simultaneously. Thus if sufficient coins are examined, a die sequence can definitely be determined.



"Year One of the
Redemption of Israel"
132/133 AD



"Year Two of the
Freedom of Israel"
Shin form: Rounded ω
133/134 AD



"Year Two of the
Freedom of Israel"
Shin form: Angular W
133/134 AD



"For the Freedom
of Jerusalem"
134/135 AD

Bibliophile Corner

SHEKEL MEDALS AND FALSE SHEKELS

This important work was originally published by Professor Bruno Kisch in HISTORIA JUDAICA Volume III, No. 2, and was later (1941) reprinted in a booklet. It is the standard work on the "False Shekels" mentioned in this month's Numystery. Unfortunately it is extremely difficult to find a copy for sale.

In his introductory section, *Scientific Investigation of the Shekel*, Kisch presents the following background on the earliest pictorial representation of the genuine ancient Jewish Shekel.



The Spanish poet and theologian, Arias Montanus (1527-1598) was, to this writer's knowledge, the first to make an exact reproduction of a genuine silver shekel. In the appendix of the Antwerp Polyglot of 1572 this exact engraving of his shekel specimen appeared with the notation on its thickness and a transcription of the ancient Hebrew legend in square type. "Philipp. Gal." is named as the engraver, probably the well-known artist of Antwerp, Philippus Galle (1537-1612). The exactness of the letters displays the careful supervision by Arias Montanus; for in a new edition of this work, originally published in 1572 (*Tubalcain sive de mensuris*), in Arias Montanus' *Antiquitatum Judaicarum Libri IX* (Lugduni Batavorum, 1593) the engraving is reproduced but the engraver's signature omitted. In the engraving of 1593 many inaccuracies in details can be found, for example the letters *Aleph* and *Kaph* are incorrectly written.

The shekel pictured by Arias Montanus stems from the year One. The moving love of the humanist for the antique object, of the priest for the relic from classical Judaic times, is seen in Arias Montanus account on the acquisition of his shekel specimen which served as the model for the first exact publication of a shekel picture. As a participant in the Tridentine Council (1545-1563), he relates, he studied among other works Ramban's Pentateuch Commentary. He cites Ramban's passages on the shekel; and that very night when he studied this chapter, he received thirteen ancient gold coins from his friend, an archbishop, with the request for an expert numismatic and archeological judgment and with the permission to keep one of the coins as compensation therefor. Among these gold coins there was one silver shekel whose genuineness cannot be doubted from the engraving. Arias Montanus requested to keep this one. True W. Postell in his book, *Linguarum duodecim characteribus differentium alphabetum* (Paris, 1538), had published the first illustration of a shekel, thirty-five years before Arias Montanus, but there is no comparison with the painstaking accuracy of the illustration as given by Philip Galle's engraving. Despite this, Postell's picture may have been reproduced from a genuine shekel (of the year Two).

BREAKING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

The greatest barrier to more widespread interest in the collecting of ancient Judaeen coins in America and elsewhere is probably the "strange" alphabet used—ancient Hebrew. This early Hebrew is directly descended from the original Phoenician alphabet, and interestingly is a first cousin to modern west-European alphabets and only distantly related to modern "square" Hebrew. The geneology of ancient and modern Hebrew, and other alphabets is shown in a number of readily available sources, among them David Diringer's "The Story of the Aleph Beth".

Because of the close relationship between the ancient Hebrew used on the Judean coins and our own English letters, the reading of these two thousand year old coin inscriptions is much easier than would first appear. The ancient Lamed (L) is easily recognizable as an "L", the Tav (X) is a "t", the Yod (Z) is a "Y", the Mem (M) turned upside down is an "m", and with a little imagination you can see how the Vav (F) evolved into our "F". Some of the ancient Hebrew letters bear a close resemblance to ancient/modern Greek; Gimmel (7) is a backwards Gamma (Г), Dalet (A) is a Delta (Δ) with a tail, Hey (Э) evolved into Eta (Η), Resh (P) is a backwards Rho (Ρ), and so on. And Finally, there are also similarities between some ancient and modern Hebrew letters: Koff (ancient P vs. modern P), Shin(ω vs. ש) and Aleph (X vs. א).

The table illustrates the ancient Hebrew alphabet along with the modern "square" Hebrew, English and numerical equivalents; it originally appeared in Reinach's "Jewish Coins" (1903). Note that the ancient Hebrew letters appeared in various forms on the coins.

The ancient Hebrew coin inscriptions are written from right to left as is modern Hebrew. Interestingly, Greek writing was originally right to left but evolved into boustrophedon (altering lines right to left, then left to right, and so on), and finally after 500 BC to the present left to right. This reversal in the direction of writing probably explains the mirror imaging of some of the ancient Hebrew and equivalent Greek letters (e.g. Gimmel 7 and Gamma Г).

The ancient coin inscriptions are rather limited in scope; this combined with the easily recognized letters makes it relatively simple to identify and then fully read these 2000 year old messages. Every one of these messages is a page out of ancient history through which we can share the triumphs and struggles of the tiny Jewish nation.

It is through changing coin inscriptions on early Jewish coins, issued by Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BCE) that we learn about objections to his original title of "King" which appeared on his small bronze coins; later inscriptions indicate that the coins were issued by "Jonathan (Jannaeus' Hebrew name) the High Priest and the Community of the Jews."

The bronze Prutah coins issued by the Jews during the first Revolt (66-70 CE) against the Romans were important propaganda pieces which proclaimed the "Deliverance of Zion", and the famous silver Shekels declared "Jerusalem the Holy".

Through the coins of the Second Revolt (132-135 CE) scholars first learned the first name of the revolutionary leader Simon Bar Kochba. Both his given name and title (Nasi, which means Prince) are found on scarce bronzes of this period. An even rarer legend declares "Eleazar the Priest". Meshorer indicates that "we know nothing other than his name on the coins".

Name.	Form.	Sound.	General Coin Form ¹ .	Number.
Aleph	א	Smooth breathing	Ⲑ Ⲡ ⲡ	1
Beth	ב	B	Ⲕ	2
Gimel	ג	G	Ⲍ	3
Daleth	ד	D	Ⲍ	4
He	ה	H	Ⲉ Ⲩ	5
Vau	ו	V	Ⲓ Ⲕ Ⲗ Ⲙ	6
Zayin	ז	Z	Ⲓ Ⲕ	7
Heth	ח	H	Ⲕ	8
Teth	ט	Ṭ	none	9
Yodh	י	Ṭ	Ⲛ Ⲟ	10
Kaph	כ ך	K	Ⲛ	20
Lamedh	ל	L	Ⲛ	30
Mem	מ ם	M	Ⲛ	40
Nun	נ ן	N	Ⲛ	50
Samekh	ס	S	none	60
Ayin	ע	Aspirate	Ⲛ	70
Pe	פ ף	P	none	80
Çadha	צ	SS	Ⲛ	90
Qoph	ק	Q	Ⲛ	100
Resh	ר	R	Ⲛ	200
Shin	ש	SH	Ⲛ Ⲟ Ⲟ	300
Tau	ת	T	Ⲛ	400

1. The coin forms are only general : most letters present variations.
2. The Hebrews used no vowel signs.

The ancient Hebrew coin alphabet is an important tool for Alphabetologists since it represents the last usage of this early writing, which had first developed in the twelfth century BCE. Modern (square) Hebrew had essentially reached its final form in the first century BCE. The use of the ancient alphabet on Judaeen coins remains therefore a topic for continued research by scholars. Diringer claims that it "cannot be considered archaizing. It must have been a script still in use amongst a section of the population." Tadmor writes in INSCRIPTIONS REVEAL (1973) that, "In the Second Temple period, the Aramaic language and script were in daily use, and the archaic script was limited to special usage. Thus, on the Jewish coins, the archaic Hebrew script was employed for nationalistic reasons, and it is also found in certain of the Dead Sea Scrolls for the same reason".

Lastly, it should be mentioned that there appears to have been a brief experiment by Alexander Jannaeus in using square Hebrew. Dr. J. Naveh first described the modern square legends in 1968 in the Israel Exploration Journal, where he wrote: "it would be simplest to assume that the occurrence of the Aramaic legend on these coins was an attempt to speak to the people in their own language and script; i.e. to enable all the Jews to read this legend, as neither Greek nor palaeo-Hebrew were their means of communication." This experimental issue also happens to be the earliest known dated Jewish coin.

0944J0X5N N55N πϣ ηϛ

Alexander the King—Year 25

Only ancient Judaeen coin using "modern" square Hebrew alphabet... struck by Alexander Jannaeus in 78 BC.

NUMYSTERY NUMBER TWO

One of the most familiar of all ancient Biblical coins to the man-on-the-street is described in Matthew (26:15), "What will ye give me (Judas Iscariot), and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for *thirty pieces of silver*." In Mark and Luke, the payment is referred to simply as *money* in the King James Version.

Interestingly, one can go all the way back to the Book of Exodus (21:32) to find a similar phrase: "If the ox shall push a manservant or a maidservant, he shall give unto their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned." However, here the similarity ends, for there were no coins used in Old Testament times and the reference in Exodus is to weights of silver, whereas the New Testament is obviously indicating silver coins. Over the past 500 odd years, scholars and would-be scholars alike have speculated on which ancient coins were most likely the type of the "30 pieces of silver."

The following is the written description accompanying a "coin" replica that was being sold by one of the largest dealers in London just 75 years ago!

CAST-IRON MODEL OF JEWISH SHEKEL

This is a facsimile of a genuine Shekel (called in the Bible "a piece of silver"), coined by Simon Maccabens, who was King of the Jews, B.C. 172-142.

It was issued in the year B.C. 170. It is therefore, now 2,068 years old.

For thirty "pieces of silver" Judas betrayed our Lord. The Hebrew inscription on the obverse and reverse mean "Shekel of Israel" and "Liberator of Jerusalem," and the designs represent the pot of manna and Aaron's rod that budded.

Such "False Shekels" have been made, often with sincere intentions, for more than 400 years! These are actually crude copies of authentic Jewish Shekels (for an early drawing of the real thing see this month's *Bibliophile Corner*), however, there are several problems:

(1) Jewish Shekels were only minted during the First Revolt (66-70 AD), over 30 years after Jesus' death.

(2) Modern "square" Hebrew is used for the inscriptions, whereas all ancient Jewish coins use ancient Hebrew (with a single exception described in **BREAKING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER**). And the inscription should read "Jerusalem the Holy" not "Liberator of Jerusalem."

(3) The actual devices on the Jewish Shekels were a chalice and budding pomegranates, not a pot of manna and Aaron's rod!

While several ancient Roman and Greek silver coins have been proposed as the type of the "30 pieces of silver," the term most likely refers to the largest silver coins in general circulation in Judaea at that time. By far the most common coin that fits the bill is the Shekel of Tyre. These were minted in huge numbers in the important Phoenician port city (in present day Lebanon) from the year in which they won autonomy from Syria in 126 BC until 66 AD. The annual Temple Tax payable by every adult Jewish male had to be in the form of Shekels or Half Shekels of Tyre, in acknowledgement of their good silver quality and general availability.

The Tyrian silver pieces are dated according to the number of years since their independence in 126 BC. Unfortunately when Shekels of Tyre are sold, the date is often not indicated in the catalog or price list. Technically it should be possible to locate a specimen dated in the exact year of the Betrayal (30 AD = 156th year of Tyrian autonomy), however, this would be most difficult to track down.

No one can ever be sure that a particular Shekel of Tyre is actually one of the "30 pieces of silver," but one can hold the same *type* of coin that likely was eventually "cast down (by Judas) . . . in the temple . . . and the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, it is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought them the potters field, to bury strangers in" (Matthews 27:5-7).



Shekel of Tyre
126 BC-66 AD



Jewish Shekel
66-70 AD



False Shekel
c. 16th-20th Century

BIBLICAL NUMISMATIC SOCIETY Charter Members receive over \$20 worth of benefits for only the \$8 annual dues . . . Monthly newsletter-The AUGUR-written in non-technical, down to earth language-Full color 35 mm slide of the Biblical-Coin-of-the-Month-Handbook of Biblical Numismatics from Abraham to the Crusaders-Bonus Charter Membership Shekel token.

Send your check for \$8 to the BIBLICAL NUMISMATIC SOCIETY, 9301 Wilshire Boulevard, Beverly Hills, California 90210.